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[The Hill](#)

House lawmakers appear unlikely to give themselves a raise in 2011, but they're at odds over how to handle their pay after next year.

Reps. Ron Paul (R-Texas) and Harry Mitchell (D-Ariz.) want member salaries frozen only in 2011, while Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Ga.) would cut lawmakers' pay each year the government runs a deficit.

Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) wants to scrap the automatic cost-of-living system altogether and establish an independent commission to assess possible pay raises, which would then be subject to an up-or-down vote.

With Congress's approval ratings spiraling downward, criticism of government bailouts running rampant and unemployment hovering at 10 percent, allowing a cost-of-living pay increase is best avoided, several lawmakers said.

"No, I don't think we'll be getting a cost-of-living increase," said Rep. Robert Brady (D-Pa.), chairman of the House Administration Committee, which handles legislation dealing with congressional pay matters.

Congressional cost-of-living adjustments are calculated using a formula based on changes in private-sector wages and salaries as measured by the Employment Cost Index. Since this method began in 1990, Congress has accepted a raise 13 times and denied itself a pay increase seven times.

The law governing congressional pay raises requires members to vote against getting a raise. Otherwise, the raise takes effect automatically.

The House last February voted not to give itself a raise in 2009 and instead to freeze its pay.

By rescinding the \$2,610 salary increase for each member in 2010 (a 1.5 percent pay increase

above current salaries), lawmakers saved taxpayers more than \$1.4 million.

The base pay for a House member is \$174,000, though leaders earn a higher salary.

Another \$2.5 million was saved by preventing the \$4,700 increase for each member from going into effect in 2009.

In 2008, members did not opt to rescind their pay and received a \$4,100, or 2.5 percent, increase, amounting to more than \$2.2 million.

Some lawmakers, like Rep. Michael Capuano (D-Mass.), argue voters care more about major issues like healthcare and the wars in the Middle East than they do about lawmakers' salaries.

"No, [I don't think it will become a campaign issue], because I think voters care more about other issues, like the economy, healthcare, war and peace," said Capuano, a member of the Administration panel.

More than a dozen members put forward measures that would have rescinded their automatic pay raise for 2010 or required members to vote for their pay raise.

Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.) introduced a bill that would not allow for an automatic pay increase every year following a federal budget deficit. Stearns said Democrats will likely freeze the automatic increase for 2011, but will stop short of changing the system to one in which members have to vote for a pay raise, instead of against one.

"I suspect the Democrats will not allow any of it," he said when asked about the likelihood of voting to change the system.

"They would rather freeze it and then let it occur after the election year. So they can say during the campaign, 'We froze it.' But then afterward to have it come back as normal," he said.

The advocacy group National Taxpayers Union (NTU) said that if Democrats do not freeze 2011's pay increase, they could be hurt by voters in the elections this fall.

"It may not be political suicide if they don't handle it, but they'll sure give themselves a number of political nicks that will be difficult to bandage up," said Pete Sepp, spokesman for NTU.

Issa argues that some lawmakers need the cost-of-living pay increase. Politicizing the issues risks turning the Congress into an institution where only the wealthy can work.

"I didn't come here for the paycheck - I literally give away my salary every year - but I'm an exception. Most members of Congress need their paycheck to send their kids to school, and that's what's unfair, to make it political," said Issa, the ranking Republican on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

He said members should not play "political football" with their salaries.

"If you pay too little, you will get either a low quality of legislator or a selection of people like myself who do not need the money."